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RECAPITULATION

(I) ONTOGENY

The silent dark serenity of womb
Begins to pall. He fights with heedless urge
Toward light, and sound, and air that crisps his lungs,
    Then roots himself in soil
    Dives deep in salty seas
    Climbs up earth's gullied breasts
    Spelunks in uterine caves
    And reaches for the moon
In search of surging life he knew, unknowing,
In his unborn past—until he finds
The threshold of the open door of death.

(II) PHYLOGENY

Man's embryo is archive of his past.
It kinescopes the long ascent from brine
In brief, unerring recapitulation,
    Until the nascent one,
    His species' living sum
    Completed for beginning,
    Quits the common womb
    To individuate.
Then rupturing the mold, but molded still—
From soon receding total known of life,
Unknowing, he extrapolates his own.

CECIL FRANKING WU

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